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ABSTRACT

A case study examined the logic of a student's unconventional interpretation of a poem. The subject, an outgoing and well-spoken student from the lower-middle class enrolled in a remedial composition class at the University of California, offered an unconventional reading of a poem by a contemporary Japanese-American writer. Data consisted of recordings of teacher-student conferences concentrating on the interpretation of the poem, a stimulated-recall session, and a follow-up interview. A "conventional" reading of the poem was constructed by asking six readers socialized in American literature departments (two senior English majors, two graduate students, and two English professors) to interpret the lines in question. Results indicated that while the subject's interpretation of the physical environment of the poem (that the character does not live in the wooden shacks and that she is really not poor) differed from the "conventional" reading, his interpretation was coherent and logical. Results also indicated that teacher talk in the conference was often qualified, challenged, and interrupted and that teacher expectations were often unfulfilled. Findings suggest that the laudable goal of facilitating underprepared students' entry into the academic community is actually compromised by a conversational pattern that channels students like the subject discussed here into more "efficient" discourse. (Excerpts from the teacher-student conference are included.) (RS)

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"THIS WOODEN SHACK PLACE": THE LOGIC OF AN UNCONVENTIONAL READING

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This is a paper about student interpretations of literature that strike the teacher as unusual, a little off, not on the mark. When we teachers enter classrooms with particular poems or stories in hand, we also enter with expectations about the kind of student responses that would be most fruitful, and these expectations have been shaped, for the most part, in literature departments in American universities. We value some readings more than others—even, in our experience, those of us who advocate a reader's free play. One inevitable result of this situation is that there will be moments of mismatch between what a teacher expects and what students do. What interests us about this mismatch is the possibility that our particular orientations and readings might blind us to the possible logic of a student's interpretation and the ways that interpretation might be sensibly influenced by the student's history.

The two of us have been involved for several years in a study of remedial writing instruction in American higher education, attempting to integrate social-cultural and cognitive approaches to better understand the institutional and classroom practices that contribute to students being designated remedial (Hull & Rose, 1989). One of the interesting things that has emerged as we've been conducting this research is the place of reading in the remedial writing classroom, particularly at a time when composition professionals are calling for the integration of reading and writing and affirming, as well, the place of literature in remedial instruction (Bartholomae & Petrosky, 1986; Salvatori, 1983). As this integration of reading, and particularly the reading of literature, into the remedial writing classroom continues, composition teachers will increasingly be called on to explore questions of interpretation, expectation, and background knowledge—particularly given the rich mix of class and culture found in most remedial programs. We would like to consider these issues by examining a discussion of a poem that was part of a writing assignment. Specifically, we will analyze a brief stretch of discourse, one in which a student's personal history and cultural background shape a somewhat unconventional reading of a section of a poem. We will note the way that mismatch plays itself out in conversation, the logic of the student's reading and the coherent things it reveals about his history, and the pedagogical implications of conducting a conversation that encourages that logic to unfold.

THE POEM

The stretch of discourse we're going to analyze comes from a conference that immediately followed a classroom discussion of a poem by the contemporary Japanese-American writer Garrett Kaoru Hongo (1982). The class is designated as the most remedial composition class at the University of California; it is part of a special program on the Los Angeles campus (the Freshman Preparatory Program) for students determined by test scores to be significantly at-risk. (The SAT verbal scores of this particular section, for example, ranged from 220 to 400.) Mike Rose taught the class at the time he was collecting data on remedial writing instruction at the university level, and though his class was not the focus of his research, he did keep a teaching log, photocopy all work produced by the class, collect socio-historical and process-tracing data on several students, and tape record selected conferences and tutorial sessions with them. For reasons that will shortly be apparent, a student named Robert was one of those Rose followed; he will be the focus

of this paper. Let us begin this analysis with the poem Robert and the others in the class read; the discussion took place during the third week of the fall quarter:

And Your Soul Shall Dance

for Wakako Yamauchi

Walking to school beside fields
of tomatoes and summer squash,
alone and humming a Japanese love song,
you've concealed a copy of *Photoplay*
between your algebra and English texts.
Your knee socks, saddle shoes, plaid dress,
and blouse, long-sleeved and white
with ruffles down the front,
come from a Sears catalogue
and neatly complement your new Toni curls.
All of this sets you apart from the landscape:
flat valley grooved with irrigation ditches,
a tractor grinding through alkaline earth,
the short stands of windbreak eucalyptus
shuttering the desert wind
from a small cluster of wooden shacks
where your mother hangs the wash.
You want to go somewhere.
Somewhere far away from all the dust
and sorting machines and acres of lettuce.
Someplace where you might be kissed
by someone with smooth, artistic hands.
When you turn into the schoolyard,
the flagpole gleams like a knife blade in the sun,
and classmates scatter like chickens,
shooed by the storm brooding on your horizon.

Garrett Kaoru Hongo (1982, p. 69)

The class did pretty well with "And Your Soul Shall Dance." They followed the narrative line, pictured the girl, and understood the tension between her desires (and her dress) and the setting she's in. The ending, with its compressed set of similes and metaphors, understandably gave them some trouble—many at first took it literally, pictured it cinematically. But, collaboratively, the class came to the understanding that the storm meant something powerful and disquieting was brewing, and that the girl—the way she looks, her yearning for a different life—was somehow central to the meaning of the storm. The class was not able, however, to fit all the pieces together into one or more unified readings. And during the discussion—as members of the class focused on particular lines—some students offered observations or answers to questions or responses to classmates that seemed to be a little off the mark, unusual, as though the students weren't reading the lines carefully. Rose wondered if these "misreadings" were keeping the students from a fuller understanding of the way the storm could be integrated into the preceding events of the poem. One of these students was Robert.

ROBERT

A brief introduction. Robert is engaging, polite, style-conscious, intellectually curious. His father is from Trinidad, his mother from Jamaica, though he was born in Los Angeles and bears no easily discernable signs of island culture. His parents are divorced, and while he spends time with both, he currently lives with his mother in a well-kept, apartment-dense area on the western edge of Central Los Angeles. Robert's family, and many of their neighbors, fall in the lower-middle class SES bracket. He was bussed to middle and high school in the more affluent San Fernando Valley. His high school g.p.a. was 3.35; his quantitative SAT was 410, and his verbal score was 270. In class he is outgoing and well-spoken—if with a tinge of shyness—and though his demeanor suggests he is a bit unsure of himself, he volunteers answers and responds thoughtfully to his classmates.

During the last half hour of the class on the Hongo poem, the students began rough drafts of an interpretive essay, and in his paper Robert noted that his "interpretation of this poem is that this girl seems to want to be different from society." (And later, he would tell his teacher that Hongo's poem "talked about change.") Robert clearly had a sense of the poem, was formulating an interpretation, but he, like the others, couldn't unify the poem's elements, and Rose assumed Robert's inability was caused by his misreading of sections of the poem. Here is Rose's entry in his teacher's log:

> Robert was ok on the 1st third of the poem, but seemed to miss the point of the central section. Talk with the tutor—does he need help with close reading?

Rose decided to get a better look, so he moved his regularly-scheduled conference with Robert up a week and tape recorded it. In the three-minute excerpt from that conference that follows, Robert is discussing the storm at the poem's conclusion—the foreboding he senses—but is having some trouble figuring out exactly what the source of this impending disruption is. Rose asks Robert if—given the contrast between the farming community and the girl's dreams and appearance—he could imagine a possible disruption in her not-too-distant future. We pick up the conversation at this point. To help clarify his own expectations, Rose replayed the stretch of tape as soon as Robert left, trying to recall what he intended in asking each of his questions.

1a Rose: What do you think . . . what, you know, on the one hand what might the reaction of her parents be, if she comes in one day and says, "I, I don't like it here, I want to leave here, I want to be different from this, I want to go to the city and . . . " [*Expectation*: Robert will say the parents will be resistant, angry—something rooted in the conservative values associated with poor, traditional families.]

1b Robert: Um, that would basically depend on the wealth of her family. You'd wanna know if her parents are poor . . . (mumbling) . . . they might not have enough money, whereas they can't go out and improve, you know . . . [Responds with a *qualification* that complicates the question by suggesting we need to know more. This further knowledge concerns the family's economic status, something Rose had assumed was evident.]

2a Rose: Ok. Ok. [*Acknowledges with hesitation*] From what we see about the background here and the times and the look, what can . . . can we surmise, can we imagine, do you thing her parents are wealthy or poor? [*Focuses* on the poem, asking for a conjecture. *Expectation*: that Robert's attention will be drawn to the shacks, the hand laundering, the indications of farm labor.]

2b Robert: I wouldn't say that they're wealthy but, again, I wouldn't say that they are poor either. [Responds with a *qualification*.]

3a Rose: Ok. [*Acknowledges with hesitation*] And why not? [Requests *elaboration*. *Expectation*: Robert will provide something from the poem, some line that explains the ambiguity in his answer.]

3b Robert: Because typical farm life is, you know, that's the way that you see yourself, you know, wear jeans, just some old jeans, you know, some old saddle shoes, boots or something, some old kinda shirt, you know, with some weird design on the shoulder pad . . . [Responds by creating a *scenario*]

3c Rose: Uh huh . . . [*Unsure about direction*, but *acknowledges*]

3d Robert: . . . for the guys. And then girls, probably wear some kind of plain cloth skirt, you know, with some weird designs on it and a weird shirt. I couldn't really . . . you really wouldn't know if they're . . . whether they were rich or not. Cause mainly everyone would dress the same way . . . [Continues *scenario* leading to an *observation*]

4a Rose: Yeah. [Sees the purpose of the scenario] That's right, so you wouldn't be able to tell what the background is, right? [*Confirms* Robert's observation and *reflects back*] Let's see if there's anything in the poem that helps us out. (pause) "All of this sets you apart . . . " this is about line twelve in the poem, "All of this sets you apart from the landscape: / flat valley grooved with irrigation ditches, / a tractor grinding through alkaline earth, / the short stands of windbreak eucalyptus / shuttering the desert wind / from a small cluster of wooden shacks / where your mother hangs the wash." [*Focuses* on poem] Now if she lives with her mother in a wooden shack, a shack . . . [*Begins line of reasoning*]

4b Robert: Ok. Ok. Oh! [*interrupts*] Right here—is it saying that she lives with her mother, or that she just goes to this wooden shack place to *hang* her clothes? [*Challenges* teacher's line of reasoning]

4c: Rose: Oh, I see. So you think that it's possible then that her mother . . . [*Reflects back*]

4d Robert: [*picks up thought*] washes her clothes probably at home somewhere and then walks down to this place where the wind . . . the wind . . . so the eucalyptus trees block this wind, you know, from . . . [*Elaborates*]

4e Rose: [*picks up thought*] so that the clothes can dry.

4f Robert: Right. [*Confirms*]

5a Rose: Well, that's certainly possible. That's certainly possible. [*Confirms*] Um, the only thing I would say if I wanted to argue with you on that would be that that's possible, but it's also the only time that this writer lets us know anything about where she might live, etc. [*Begins to explain his interpretation*—an interpretation we'd argue that is fairly conventional: that the family is poor, and that poverty is signalled by the shacks, the place, most likely, where the family lives.]

ANALYSIS

Certainly not all of Robert's exchanges—in classroom or conference—are so packed with qualification and interruption and are so much at cross-purposes with teacher expectation. Still, this stretch of discourse is representative of the characteristics that make Robert's talk about texts interesting to us. Let us begin by taking a closer look at the reasoning Robert exhibits as he discusses "And Your Soul Shall Dance." To conduct this analysis, we'll be intersecting socioeconomic, cognitive, and textual information, bringing these disparate sources of information together to help us understand Robert's interpretation of sections of "And Your Soul Shall Dance," explicating not the poem, but a particular reading of it in a particular social-textual setting.

Here are a few brief comments on method:

Our data come from the stretch of discourse we just examined, from other sections of the same conference, from a stimulated-recall session (on an essay Robert was writing for class) conducted one week prior to the conference,[1] and from a follow-up interview conducted four months after the conference to collect further socio-historical information.

To confirm our sense of what a "conventional" reading of this section of the poem would be, we asked six people to interpret the lines in question. Though our readers represented a mix of ages and cultural backgrounds, all had been socialized in American literature departments: two senior English majors—one of whom is Japanese-American—two graduate students—one of whom is African-American—and two English professors—one of whom is Mexican-American. Regardless of age or cultural background, all quickly offered the same interpretation we will be suggesting is conventional.[2]

Now to the analysis.

Segment 1a-1b

1a Rose: What do you think . . . what, you know, on the one hand what might the reaction of her parents be, if she comes in one day and says, "I, I don't like it here,

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[1] In stimulated recall, a student's writing is videotaped and, upon completion, replayed to cue recall of mental processes occurring during composing. For further discussion of the procedure and its advantages and limitations, see Rose (1984).

[2] Frankly, we had trouble arriving at a way to designate the readings we're calling conventional and unconventional. And we're not satisfied yet. Certain of Robert's responses seem to be influenced by class (e.g., his reaction to the wooden shacks and Sears), and we note that, but with reluctance. We don't want to imply that class is the primary determiner of Robert's reading (vs., say, socialization into an English department—which, we realize, would correlate with class.) We also don't want to imply that middle-class readers would, by virtue of class, automatically see things in a certain way, would have no trouble understanding particular images and allusions. One of the people who read this paper for us, Dennis Lynch, suggested that we use Wayne Booth's notion of "intended audience"—that Robert is simply not a member of the audience for whom the poem was written; thus, he offers a reading that differs from the reading we're calling conventional. The notion of intended audience makes sense here, and fits with our discussion of socialization. Hongo, like most younger American poets, honed his craft in an English department and an MFA program, places where one's work is influenced by particular audiences—fellow poets, faculty, journal editors, etc. But, finally, we decided not to use the notion of intended audience, for it carries with it a theoretical framework we're not sure does Robert or Hongo full justice here. We use words like "conventional" and "middle-class," then, with reserve and invite our readers to help us think through this problem.

I want to leave here, I want to be different from this, I want to go to the city and . . . "

1b Robert: Um, that would basically depend on the wealth of her family. You'd wanna know if her parents are poor . . . (mumbling) . . . they might not have enough money, whereas they can't go out and improve, you know . . .

Robert claims that the reaction of the girl's parents to "I want to leave [here] and go to the city . . . " would "depend on the wealth of her family." This qualification is legitimate, though the reasoning behind it is not quickly discernable. In the follow-up interview Robert elaborates: "[If she goes to the city] she's gonna need support . . . and if they're on a low budget they won't have that much money to be giving to her all the time to support her." The social context of Robert's reasoning becomes clearer here. He comes from a large family (11 siblings and half-siblings), some members of which have moved (and continue to move) across cultures and, to a degree, across class lines. It is the parents' obligation to help children as they make such moves, and Robert is aware of the strains on finances such movement brings—he is in the middle of such tension himself.

Segment 2a-4d

This segment includes Robert's qualified response to "do you think her parents are wealthy or poor?", his farm fashion scenario, and his perception of the "small cluster of wooden shacks." As we've seen, we need to understand Robert's perception of the shacks in order to understand his uncertainty about the parents' economic status, so we'll reverse the order of events on the transcript and deal first with the shacks.

4a Rose: Yeah. That's right, so you wouldn't be able to tell what the background is, right? Let's see if there's anything in the poem that helps us out. (pause) "All of this sets you apart . . . " this is about line twelve in the poem, "All of this sets you apart from the landscape: / flat valley grooved with irrigation ditches, / a tractor grinding through alkaline earth, / the short stands of windbreak eucalyptus / shuttering the desert wind / from a small cluster of wooden shacks / where your mother hangs the wash." Now if she lives with her mother in a wooden shack, a shack . . .

4b Robert: Ok. Ok. Oh! Right here—is it saying that she lives with her mother, or that she just goes to this wooden shack place to *hang* her clothes?

Those of us educated in a traditional literature curriculum, and especially those of us trained in an English graduate program, are schooled to comprehend the significance of the shacks. We understand, even if we can't readily articulate them, the principles of compression and imagistic resonance that underlie Hongo's presentation of a single image to convey information about economic and historical background. Robert, however, isn't socialized to such conventions, or is only partly socialized, and so he relies on a model of interpretation Rose had seen him rely on in class and in the stimulated-recall session: an almost legalistic model, a careful, qualifying reasoning that defers quick judgement, that demands multiple sources of verification. The kind of reasoning we see here, then, is not inadequate. In fact, it's pretty sophisticated—though it is perhaps inappropriately invoked in a poetic world, as Rose begins to suggest to Robert in 5a. We'll come back to this momentarily, but first we want to address one more issue related to Robert's uncertainty about the income level of the girl's parents.

We would like to raise the possibility that Robert's background makes it unlikely that he is going to respond to "a small cluster of wooden shacks" in quite the same way—

with quite the same emotional reaction—as would a conventional (and most likely middle-class) reader for whom the shacks might function as a quickly discernable, emblematic literary device. Some of Robert's relatives in Trinidad still live in houses like those described in the poem, and his early housing in Los Angeles—further into Central Los Angeles than where he now lives—was quite modest. We would suggest that Robert's "social distance" from the economic reality of poor landscapes isn't as marked as that of the conventional/middle-class reader, and this might make certain images less foreign to him, and, therefore, less emotionally striking. This is certainly *not* to say that Robert is naive about his current position in American society, but simply to say that the wooden shacks might not spark the same *dramatic* response in him as in a conventional/middle-class reader. The same holds true for another of Hongo's indicators of economic status—the hanging of the wash—for Robert's mother still "likes to wash her clothes by hand." Paradoxically, familiarity might work against certain kinds of dramatic response to aspects of working-class life.

In line with the above assertion, we would like to consider one last indicator of the girl's economic status—the mention of the Sears catalogue. The Sears catalogue, we believe, cuts two ways in the poem: it suggests lower-income level shopping ("thrifty" as one of our readers put it) and, as well, the importing of another culture's garments. But the catalogue also carries with it an ironic twist: it's not likely that conventional readers would consider a Sears catalogue to be a source of fashion, so there's a touch of irony—perhaps pity mixed with humor—in this girl fulfilling her romantic dreams via Sears and Roebuck. We suggest that Robert's position in the society makes it difficult for him to see things this way, to comply with this conventional reading. He knows merchandise from Sears is "economical" and "affordable," and, to him, there's nothing ironic, pitiable, or humorous about that. When asked if he sees anything sad or ironic about the girl buying there he responds "Oh, no, no," pointing out that "some of the items they sell in Sears, they sell in other stores." He then goes on to uncover an interesting problem in the poem. He uses the Sears catalogue to support his assertion that the family isn't all that poor (and thus doesn't necessarily live in those shacks): "She couldn't be really poor because she has clothes from the Sears catalogue." Robert knows what real poverty is, and he knows that if you have enough money to buy at Sears, you're doing ok. He goes on to speculate—again with his careful, qualifying logic—that if she is as poor as the shacks suggest, then maybe the Sears clothes could be second-hand and sent to her by relatives, in the way his family sends clothes and shoes to his relatives in Trinidad. Hongo's use of the Sears catalogue is, in some ways, undercut by other elements in his poem.

3b Robert: Because typical farm life is, you know, that's the way that you see yourself, you know, wear jeans, just some old jeans, you know, some old saddle shoes, boots or something, some old kinda shirt, you know, with some weird design on the shoulder pad . . .

3c Rose: Uh huh . . .

3d Robert: . . . for the guys. And then girls, probably wear some kind of plain cloth skirt, you know, with some weird designs on it and a weird shirt. I couldn't really . . . you really wouldn't know if they're . . . whether they were rich or not. Cause mainly everyone would dress the same way . . .

Now we can turn to the farm fashion scenario. Given that the "small cluster of wooden shacks" does not seem to function for Robert as it might for the conventional reader, he is left more to his own devices when asked: "do you think her parents are wealthy or poor?" What begins as a seeming non sequitur—and a concrete one at that—does reveal its purpose as Robert plays it out. Though Robert has a frame of reference to

understand the economics of the scene in "And Your Soul Shall Dance" and the longing of its main character, he is, after all, a city boy, born and raised in Central Los Angeles. What he does, then, when asked a question about how one determines the economic background of people moving across a farm landscape is to access what knowledge he does have about farm life—things he's read or heard, images he's gleaned from movies and t.v. shows (e.g., *The Little House on the Prairie*)—and create a scenario, focusing on one indicator of socioeconomic status: fashion. (And fashion is a sensible criterion to use here, given the poem's emblematic use of clothing.) Classroom-observational and stimulated-recall data suggest that Robert makes particularly good use of visual imagery in his thinking—e.g., he draws pictures and charts to help him comprehend difficult readings; he rehearses sentences by visualizing them before he writes them out—and here we see him reasoning through the use of scenario, concluding that in certain kinds of communities, distinctions by readily discernable indicators like dress might not be all that easy to make.

Segment 4d-4f

4d Robert: washes her clothes probably at home somewhere and then walks down to this place where the wind . . . the wind . . . so the eucalyptus trees block this wind, you know, from . . .

4e Rose: so that the clothes can dry.

4f Robert: Right.

This section also involves the wooden shacks, though the concern here is Robert's assertion that the mother doesn't have to live in the shacks to hang the wash there. Robert's reasoning again seems inappropriately legalistic. Yes, the mother could walk down to this place to hang her clothes; the poem doesn't specify "that [the girl] lives with her mother, or that [the mother] just goes to this wooden shack place to *hang* her clothes." But to Rose during the conference this seemed like a jurisprudential rather than a poetic reading. In the follow-up interview, however, Robert elaborated in a way that made Rose realize that Robert might have had a better imagistic case than his teacher first thought—for Rose missed the full visual particulars of the scene, did not see the importance of the "tractors grinding through alkaline earth." Robert elaborates on "this place where . . . the eucalyptus trees block this wind." He describes this "little shack area where the clothes can dry without being bothered by the wind and dust—with all this . . . the tractor grinding through the earth. That brings up dust." Robert had pictured the surrounding landscape—machines stirring up grit and dust—and saw the necessity of trees to break the dust-laden wind so that wash could dry clean in the sun. The conventional reader could point out that such a windbreak would be necessary as well to protect residents, but given Robert's other interpretations, it makes sense, is coherent, to see the shacks—sheds of some kind perhaps or abandoned housing—as part of this eucalyptus-protected place where women hang the wash. What's important to note here is that Robert was able to visualize the scene—animate it, actually—in a way that Rose was not, for Rose was focusing on the dramatic significance of the shacks. Robert's reading may be non-conventional and inappropriately jurisprudential, but it is coherent, and it allows us—in these lines—to animate the full landscape in a way that enhances our reading of the poem.

CONCLUSION

We hope we have demonstrated the logic and coherence of one student's unconventional reading. What we haven't addressed—and it could certainly now be raised—is the pedagogical wisdom of encouraging in a writing classroom the playing out

of such unconventional readings. Reviewing the brief stretch of Rose's and Robert's discourse, we see how often teacher talk is qualified, challenged, and interrupted (though not harshly), and how rarely teacher expectations are fulfilled. If the teacher's goals are to run an efficient classroom, cover a set body of material, and convey certain conventional reading and writing strategies to students who are on the margin of the academic community, then all these conversational disjunctions are troubling.

What we would like to suggest, though, is that the laudable goal of facilitating underprepared students' entry into the academic community is actually compromised by a conversational pattern that channels students like Robert into a more "efficient" discourse. The desire for efficiency and coverage can cut short numerous possibilities for students to explore issues, articulate concerns, formulate and revise problems—all necessary for good writing to emerge—and can lead to conversational patterns that socialize students into a mode of interaction that will limit rather than enhance their participation in intellectual work.[3] We would further suggest that streamlined conversational patterns (like the Initiation-Comment-Response pattern described by Mehan [1979]) are often reinforced by a set of deficit-oriented assumptions about the linguistic and cognitive abilities of remedial students, assumptions that are much in need of examination (Hull, Rose, Fraser, & Garrett, 1989; Rose, 1989).

We would pose instead a pedagogical model that places knowledge-making at its center. The conversational techniques attending such a model are not necessarily that demanding—Robert benefits from simple expressions of encouragement, focusing, and reflecting back—but the difference in assumptions is profound: That the real stuff of belonging to an academic community is dynamic involvement in generating and questioning knowledge, that students desperately need immersion in and encouragement to involve themselves in such activity, and that underprepared students are capable—given the right conditions—of engaging in such activity. We would also underscore the fact that Robert's reading a) does bring to light the problem with the Sears catalogue and b) animates the landscape as his teacher's reading did not do. Finally, we would suggest that engaging in a kind of "social-textual" analysis of Robert's reading moves us toward deeper understanding of the social base of literary interpretation (cf. Salvatori, 1989).

In calling for a richer, more transactive model of classroom discourse, we want to acknowledge that such a model removes some of the control of teacher-centered instruction and can create moments of hesitance and uncertainty (as was the case with Rose through the first half of the transcript). But hesitance and uncertainty—as we all know from our own intellectual struggles—are central to knowledge-making. Furthermore, we are not asking teachers to abandon structure, goals, and accountability. A good deal of engineering still goes on in the transactive classroom: the teacher focusing discussion, helping students better articulate their ideas, involving others, pointing out connections, keeping an eye on the clock. Even in conference, Rose's interaction with Robert is clearly goal-driven, thus Rose's reliance on focusing and reflecting back. Rose operates with a conventional reading in mind, and begins moving toward it in 5a—and does so out loud to reveal to Robert the line of such reasoning. Robert's interpretations, though, will cause his teacher to modify his reading, and the teacher's presentation of his interpretation will help Robert acquire an additional approach to the poem. (In fact, the very tension between academic convention and student experience could then become the focus of discussion.) This, we think, is the way talk and thought should go when a student seems to falter, when readings seem a little off the mark.

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[3] For two different but compatible perspectives on this claim, see Shor (forthcoming) and Tharp & Gallimore (1989).

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